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The Bhagwat Gita as a Complimentary Tool to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

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Abstract The credo of the Bhagwat Gita, a prominent spiritual book of Hindus is considered philosophical in nature. Despite having spiritual and religious value this book have many ingredients which can be of great compliment to psychology. More precisely, The Bhagwat Gita is a tête-á-tête between The Krishna, who acted as a therapist for patient, The Arjuna, suffering from Anxiety, Grief, Guilt, Fear and Depression in-spite of being the greatest warrior of that time. Entire episode of this book is a compilation of cognitive behavioral therapy sessions. The Krishna altered the distorted thinking, emotions and behavior of The Arjuna by his therapy and Arjuna showed respect and devotion towards his Therapist. Fear of sin and losing loved ones were the reason for Arjuna's suffering while The Krishna removed the cloud of doubts from his mind by delivering the knowledge of Karma(Action), Yoga(Skill in action), Nirvana (Detachment) and eternity of soul. CBT can be made easier if the patient is categorized according to his Gunas as mentioned in The Gita. Similarly, detachment of self ego from the conduct as preached in this book can relieve person from all kinds of negative thinking and haziness in mind. The Gita instruct that complete devotion towards the therapist and actions according to his words leads subject to cure.

Keywords Cognitive behavioral therapy, Bhagwat gita, Depression, Anxiety, Grief, Guilt, Renunciation, Karma yoga, Eternal soul, Work detachment, Faith, Devotion

1. Introduction

The Bhagwat Gita is a renowned spiritual book in hindu mythology. It is an anthology of Dialogues between The Lord Krishna (manifestation of Lord Vishnu) and The Arjuna (one of the prince among Pandavas) on the battlefield of Kurukshetra during commencement of the greatest war in the history of India – Mahabharata dated back to 5000 years BC. The Bhagwat Gita is a part of Bhishma Parv and The great epic Mahabharata authored by Veda Vyas consisting of 18 chapters and 701 verses in Sanskrit language. The eastern and western scholars thought The Bhagwat Gita to be among the greatest spiritual book in the world. Process of establishing undying relationship with Almighty and the knowledge of self-actualization has been wonderfully described by The Krishna in this book. The Bhagavad- Gita is unique in spiritual knowledge and its innate beauty lies with the knowledge which applies to all irrespective of any religious beliefs. It is amicable from the sacred territory of all religions and is overestimated as the personification of all spiritual teachings. Expertise of the Bhagavad- Gita reveals the lasting principles which are fundamental and essential for pious life from all viewpoints and allows one to perfectly understand the mysterious truths veiled within all religious scriptures. Many of the great thinkers from our recent past such as Einstein, Gandhi and Albert Schweizer as well as Madhvacarya, Sankaracharya and Ramanujacharya from long-gone ages have all reflected and premeditated upon its enduring message. The chief rationale of the Bhagavad- Gita is to enlighten the realization of the true spirit of mysticism; for the highest spiritual formation and the utmost material precision is to reach God's adore. Beyond being an excellent spiritual transcript the Bahgwat Gita is the very first documented Cognitive Behavioral Therapy sessions in the history of human being. Very few studies had been done on this aspect of the Gita in past. Few studies noted in the past were by K. Kuruvilla; Neki JS ; M.S. Reddy; Varma VK, Ghosh A; Subhash C Bhatia, Jayakrishna Madabushi, venkata kolli; Michael C. Dillbeck. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Scholars from Vedic Psychology department of Maharishi International University have done commendable job in this field. Studies conducted by each one of them has emphasized on the affirmative results of the Bhagwat Gita in psychotherapy. This book is considered holy and recited during various religious ceremonies or on daily basis in many hindu homes especially during mourning took place in any hindu family. It is considered that the recitation of the verses of the Bhagwat Gita removes grief and provides inner strength to the individual's feelings. The spiritual aspect of this book in Hinduism is very well established but, it is also of colossal use for Psychologist and Psychotherapist who

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deals with the patients of Anxiety, Depression, Fear, Guilt and negative attitude towards life. There has been a very few studies regarding the Psychotherapeutic use of The Bhagwat Gita in the past. This motivated to study the use of The Bhagwat Gita in Psychology. After reviewing the articles published in the past in this parlance question raised that how can The Bhagwat Gita compliment CBT to enhance its efficacy?

2. The Bhagwat Gita

The hundred sons of the blind king of 'Hastinapur', Dhritarashtra, escorted by the eldest son 'Duryodhana' combined known as 'Kauravas' gathered to fight the 'Pandavas', five sons of their demised uncle 'Pandu' for the control of kingdom at 'Kurukshetra'. Kauravas weren't the rightful heir to the empire, but they have implicit command, and Dhritarashtra tried to conserve it for his sons. 'Arjuna' was one of the princes of Pandavas who was the greatest archer of his time. 'The Krishna', relative, friend and mentor played a role of Arjuna's charioteer. The Bhagwat Gita is a collection of dialogue between The Krishna and The Arjuna before the Battle. Arjuna went into the state of anxiety and depression due to the fear of sin conduct and shedding the blood of his family, relatives, teachers and friends. After analyzing the state of mind of Arjuna, The Krishna then, delivered the systematic therapy to him for correcting his indistinct thinking.

The phase of birth and death was first explained by The Krishna and explicated that soul is imperishable. Krishna presented three main concepts for achieving this disbanding of the soul- renunciation, altruistic service and meditation for achieving 'Yoga' or skill in action. Krishna said that the really celestial human does not relinquish all worldly chattels or simply quit action, but rather finds tranquility in finishing action in the apex service of God. Hence, traps of the three Gunas: Rajas (anger, ego); Tamas (ignorance, darkness); and Saatva (harmony, purity) must be shunned. According to The Krishna, peak of meditation is achieved by getting oneself free from egocentric action simultaneously focusing on the blissful in ones action. At the end of the Bhagwat Gita Krishna said to Arjuna that he must choose the path of noble or vice. It is his duty to combat the Kauravas for his estate. In that, he is fixing the balance of noble and vice, accomplishing his Dharma (Duty), and presenting the earnest form of gallant service. Arjuna appreciates and, with that, ensues into the battle. At last after completion of entire sessions, Arjuna confirmed his curing as mentioned in verse 73 of chapter 18 that his delusion is completely eradicated by the grace of The Krishna, he affirmed regaining of of his wisdom and now on he will act firm and perform his duty as notified by Krishna.

3. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Effectiveness of CBT has been scientifically tested in number of clinical trials for various psychological disorders. CBT is problem-solving oriented, time-limited, focused on the present, identify the distorted thinking, modify believes, and change the thinking, behavior and emotional response of the clients. It is based on the cognitive model: the way we perceive situation, influence how we feel and respond emotionally. Thoughts generated by the situation affect emotional feeling. CBT combines Cognitive and behavioral therapies and has strong empirical support for treating mood and anxiety disorders (Chambless & Ollenclick, 2001: Dehubeis & Critschristopher, 1998). The basic ground of CBT is that sentiments are arduous to vary directly, so CBT aims sentiments by changing thoughts and behaviors that are adding up to the afflicting emotions. A set of skills is build in CBT to enable an individual to be aware of thoughts & emotions; recognize how circumstances, thinking, and behaviors stimulate emotions; and advance feelings by altering distorted thoughts and behaviors. Time is used to teach knacks to address the current problem in CBT sessions. CBT does not simply offer advice or discuss the issues related to the problem. CBT consult about how we think about ourselves, the world and others and how, do we affect our thoughts and feelings? The focal point of any CBT session is present problems and difficulties. CBT discuss that the event does not causes our sentiments, but elucidation of that event, what we imagine or what connotation we give that event is important. CBT breaks ferocious cycles of negative thinking, feelings and behaviors. After viewing the ingredients of this cycle clearly, it can be modified and therefore alter the opinion. CBT can be used to perceive how our thoughts and feelings influence our bodies, and the objective sensations we can experience. Some Patients think that the focus of CBT on positive thinking feels too superficial. The logical and thought-oriented component of mental life is overemphasized in CBT. The individual's capacity to change themselves (their thoughts, feelings and behavior) is focused during CBT session and does not address wider problems in the system and families. This makes clients sometime think cognitive approach as judgmental and as a moral model in turn which make them think that their distorted thinking is the basic flaw. These limitations of CBT can be overcome by the introduction of renunciation (Karma Yoga), Non-detachment to the work & its results, meditation and Non- Dual theory of The Bhagwat Gita and Faith on the therapist.

4. Extrication of Ego from Work

Doing any work with rescue from doer ship is an essence of inner peace because ego is the reason for ruining the work and distressing the mind. According to the advice of the Bhagwat Gita actions has to be executed with amorous consideration towards the divine. One has to direct oneself away from the egotistic wants, wishes and fervors for reaching distinction in performance of actions. Loksangraha which means directing ones action towards the benefit of all

human beings should be aimed as per the Bhagwat Gita. The state of Nirvana, mental equanimity is where the presence of supreme power is deemed. This concept of self has been studied by various psychologists and philosophers in India with many points of view revealing metaphysics as the core of Indian self. It is a duty of human to perform actions with disentanglement to the results of those actions. Anxiety considering the future results of his action causes mental worry in man and affects the attribute of his current deeds and predictions. Anticipations of our present deeds may or may not respond to our expectations, hence, keeping oneself detached to the results and actions deliver eternal peace of mind. This way of working is mentioned as Nishkaam Karma in the Bhagwat Gita. It prevents the egocentric actions indulgence of the mind from anticipated profit or losses. In the verses 35 and 36 of chapter 6 of The Bhagwat Gita Krishna affirms that the mind is fidgety and intricate to dominate but it can be defeated through continuous rehearsal and extrication. Those who are restrained will attain apex in the meditation while those who are not will not progress.

5. Conviction

In the scientific journals academic research over the use of Transcend Meditation was published showing the results in decreased heart rate and oxygen consumption as well as changes in certain frequencies of electroencephalograph and skin resistance during meditation (Wallace and Benson 1972). Mc Connel in 1998 at Yale University confirmed through his research on 2812 elderly people, that weekly church commuters have half the stroke rate as compared to non goers, pointing conviction towards God as a means to heal people. Study conducted at the Duke Medical School done among 455 elderly patients concluded that weekly attendance at the church by patients restricted their stay in the hospital to 4 days while non church goers spend 10-12 days in it. One more study at Dartmourh Medical School over patients reported longer living span among 37 theist patients while 21 people who were atheist died within 6 months of surgery. Entire Bhagwat Gita is based on the Faith of Arjuna over Krishna. Chapter two through Chapter eighteen Krishna developed faith in Arjuna towards him, his words and God which leads to complete renunciation. As mentioned above Faith act as a catalyst in the treatment of patient, reduce the span of wellness.

6. Parallel between the Bhagwat Gita and CBT

The very first chapter of the Bhagwat Gita known as 'Arjuna Vishad Yoga' portrays the sorrow and distress of The Arjuna while 'Moksha Sanyas Yoga', 18th chapter narrates renunciation, freedom from fear, sorrow and distress after the successful session of CBT by The Krishna. According to The Bhagwat Gita, performer of any action is liable for the corollary of his deeds. Issues from the grass root level of the human thinking are tackled in The Bhagwat Gita as the corrections made in the basic thinking of a person will instinctively correct his actions and their outcomes. In The Bhagwat Gita, The Arjuna was the patient and The Krishna was the therapist. As mentioned by Dr K.K. Agarwal, group editor in chief, IJCP "All the principles of Cognitive Behavior Therapy today are basically principles originated from Bhagwat Gita". CBT requires 18-20 sessions of counseling; similarly Gita narrates 18 chapters depicting 18 sessions of counseling. In CBT patient is first listened in detail by the therapist as in the chapter 1 of the Bhagwat Gita, The Krishna (Therapist) listened, The Arjuna quietly. Generally the first interactive session in CBT is the longest so as the case in the Gita where 1st interaction between the Krishna and The Arjuna mentioned in chapter 2 is the longest. As patient gets confused after the second session of CBT similarly, Arjuna got confused. As giving reasoning to the counseling is necessary in session, Krishna discussed each and every facet of life with Arjuna in enormous detail providing him with scientific reasons at every phase. Krishna reassured Arjuna on many occasions to perform his duty without worrying. Krishna showed his 'Viraat Roop' to Arjuna creating fear as in most of the cases of CBT is created especially for addiction patients. The last session of CBT is also one of the longest one to sum up similarly the 18th chapter of The Gita summed up the entire session and was as long as second chapter of the Gita. The Bhagwat Gita can be a source of much psychological insight to the study of cognition, emotion and behavior. The Bhagwat Gita is considered as a talk therapy but it is more than that. It is a compilation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy sessions. In modern and western psychology CBT has discovered in 1900's era, but, in Indian it was first delivered and documented in the form of Bhagwat Gita way before 5000 years BC.

As in modern CBT session, to address the current problem time is employed to coach flairs; The Krishna after identifying the reason of Arjuna's anxiety taught him skills to deal with it by imparting the knowledge of work commitment, meditation, interminable soul, non-duality, and work detachment concept. The entire therapy sessions were based on the current problem and difficulties of Arjuna. In CBT interpretation of event, thinking and meaning given to the event is important rather than the event itself and main concentration of the therapy is to make affirmative alterations in the thinking of patient, interpretation of events by him. In The Bhagwat Gita event and situations remained same as mentioned in chapter 1 through chapter 18, only the thinking, emotions and behavior of Arjuna modified after receiving CBT from Krishna.

7. Conclusions

The Gita, urges 'Yoga' which means 'dexterity in deed', which is action by means of selflessness. Krishna said it is

our basic nature – we must act in harmony with the bliss, leaving behind our own egos. These egos are just vicious deceptions. Qualities of our lives can be tainted or supported by these three Gunas. The ideal or the best guna among the three is Satva supports accord, integrity and equilibrium in the body. A primary driver of ego, rage, voracity and lust is Raajas which is born of ardor. Finally Taamas - a driver of ignorance and darkness keenly haze the mind of the person. A person's genuine penchants are presented by these three gunas. Firstly, one has to find out that to which guna he is born and they try to gradually budge for satva and finally on the way to yoga which frees him from the encumbrance of gunas. This knowledge of Guna from The Gita is of immense use for CBT therapist. Therapist can examine the subject and categorize him according to his guna like Saatva, Rajas or Tamas. It will make it easier for the therapist to alter the thinking, emotions and behavior of the subject to get better results.

The very crucial element of life is Meditation, according to the Krishna, which helps in focusing on divine. Second element is altruistic service. First step to attain as preached by the Krishna is the knowledge of stanch Nirvana. The Self-awareness directs a person on the way to Yoga that is derived from the comprehension of the divine role in all the things we do. Krishna encourages maintaining self-consciousness at every flash of life even during death Subjects suffering from Guilt, Fear, Anxiety of work and depression can be imparted the knowledge of Self-awareness and the divine role in everything we do. This will relieve the subject from all his distortions and further practice of meditation during the session will calm down his mind. Work detachment theory explained to the patient in CBT session will barr his negative thinking and all kind of distortions in mind making him rest his mind in eternal peace.

This seems to be philosophical rather than psychological. But, these teachings of Krishna eroded the main causes of Arjuna's anxiety and depressions i.e. conduct of sin and death of loved ones. Working with spiritual leaders is advocated by The Royal College of Psychiatrists as warranted in treating patients. Worldwide, irrespective of spiritual and religious backgrounds, The Zen Principle has been accepted by psychiatrists as well as patients for better results. The Bhagwat Gita teachings are spiritual but can be harnessed to benefit the patients primarily, of anxiety, guilt, fear, grief and depression. Trust and communication is the essence of CBT which is seen in the entire episode of Gita. Complete devotion of Arjuna towards the Krishna impart lecture for the patients getting CBT sessions that for getting best results and in less span of time they have to completely follow their therapist.

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